

Parashat Pekudei 5771, 2011:

The Tablets of the Testimony and the Holy Ark

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

Our *parasha* focuses once again upon the creation of the Mishkan of the Testimony (*Mishkan Haeidut*): “These are the numbers of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at Moses’ command; [this was] the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the Kohen.” (*Sefer Shemot* 38:21, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Every single detail of the Mishkan’s formation was constitutive in nature. Perhaps this is why several different *parshiot* repeat each aspect of the Mishkan’s construction – i.e. in order to teach us that absolutely nothing could be missing from the fulfillment of G-d’s Divine architectural plan.

The Holy Ark was one of the best-known vessels of the Mishkan, since it housed the *luchot haeidut* (the Tablets of the Testimony, the Ten Commandments). In two separate verses, Hashem commanded Moshe to place the *luchot haeidut* into the Holy Ark:

And you shall place into the ark the testimony, which I will give you.

And you shall place the ark cover on the ark from above, and into the ark you shall place the testimony, which I will give you. (Ibid., 25:16 and 21.)

As in all other matters, Moshe dutifully complied with G-d’s command: “He took and placed the testimony into the ark, put the poles upon the ark, and placed the ark cover on the ark from above.” (Ibid., 40:20) It should be noted that Rashi (1040-1105) explains the

expression “the testimony” (“*haeidut*”) as referring to the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. (*Sefer Shemot* 40:20) Thus, whenever the word “*haeidut*” is used, we may legitimately interpret it as referring to the tablets upon which the *Aseret Hadibrot* (Ten Commandments) were inscribed.

Rashi was troubled by the repetition of G-d’s command to Moshe to place the *eidut* into the *aron hakodesh* (the Holy Ark): “And you shall place into the ark the testimony,” and “and into the ark you shall place the testimony.” Rashi’s response (*Sefer Shemot* 25:21) to this quandary was driven by his renowned intellectual honesty and integrity: “I don’t know why (“*lo yada’ati*) this was repeated since the Torah has already stated: ‘And you shall place into the ark the testimony.’” Undaunted, the Prince of Commentators provided a likely explanation for the Torah’s reiteration that conceptually connects all three of our *pasukim* (*Sefer Shemot* 25:16, 21 and 40:20):

One may say that it intends to tell us that while the ark is still by itself – *i. e.* without the cover – he should first put the Testimony into it, and only afterwards should he put the cover on it *for the first time*. Thus indeed do we find: that when he (Moses) erected the Tabernacle it is stated, “He took and placed the testimony into the ark,” and afterwards it says, “and placed the ark cover on the ark from above.” (Translation, M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silberman, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi’s Commentary*)

I would like to provide another explanation for this duplication, focusing upon the phrase “you shall place.” I believe that the key word here is the pronoun “you.” In other words, Hashem commanded Moshe, and Moshe alone, to place the *luchot haeidut* into the *aron hakodesh*. The question, of course, is: “Why?” Other people were engaged in the myriad actions that collectively led to the completion of the Mishkan. What, then, was so special about placing the *luchot haeidut* into the Holy Ark? In my view, Hashem was teaching Moshe, and the entire Jewish people, a far-reaching and depth-level lesson, namely; each

Jew must have a personal and unique relationship with the Torah. To this end, Moshe had to physically grasp the tablets of the testimony prior to placing them permanently in the *aron hakodesh* – in order to demonstratively strengthen his relationship with them, and by extension, with the entire Torah. If this was true regarding Moshe, it is certainly the case when it comes to the rest of the Jewish people. Little wonder, then, that *Shlomo Hamelech* (King Solomon) taught us in the well-known verse from *Sefer Mishle* 3:18: “It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and those who draw near it are fortunate.” Thus, each of us should symbolically emulate *Moshe Rabbeinu* (our teacher Moses) and do our best to intellectually and emotionally grasp the Torah in order to truly make it the center of our being and lives.

May Hashem grant us the wisdom and understanding to love the Torah in all of its resplendent beauty. Moreover, just as Moshe placed the *luchot haeidut* into the *aron hakodesh*, may we follow in his footsteps and place the Torah into our hearts and minds.
V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my new website:

<http://reparashathashavuah.weebly.com/>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added please do not hesitate to contact me via email at rdbe718@gmail.com.